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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: AFGHANISTAN-NETHERLANDS, IRAN, EU-GREECE,
U.S., UK;BERLIN

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- ¶1. Lead Stories Summary

Print media led with the strike of Lufthansa pilots, while Frankfurter Rundschau and Frankfurter Allgemeine focused on the most recent statements of FDP leader Westerwelle on social security recipients. Editorials focused on the collapse of the Dutch government following the vote of the future role of Dutch forces in Afghanistan. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast heute dealt with the thunderstorms on the holiday island of Madeira, while ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau led with a story on the upcoming Lufthansa strike.

- ¶2. (Afghanistan-Netherlands) Dutch Government's Fall

All papers (2/22) carried lengthy reports on the collapse of the Dutch government over the controversy about the future Dutch mission in Afghanistan. Frankfurter Allgemeine headlined: "NATO: We Will Stay Even Without The Dutch." Sueddeutsche Zeitung carried a report, headlined: "Dutch Government Collapses Because of Afghanistan - Right Wing Populists Could be Winners in New Elections," while Die Welt headlined: "Dutch Heading for New Elections, [Experts] Expect Massive Support for Islam Critic Wilders." "Dutch Withdrawal" headlined Berliner Zeitung and reported: "As a matter of fact, NATO is trying to report positive news from Afghanistan and in the past week, it seemed to be successful with the large-scale military offensive...but over the weekend, NATO had to accept a serious setback when the Dutch governing coalition under Premier Jan Pieter Balkenende collapsed over the controversy about the right policy towards Afghanistan."

According to Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/22), "it is only a question of time until pressure in other capitals will be so great that politicians will be forced to decide between their political survival and solidarity for the Alliance. Democracies are able to wage war only when there is a sufficient politically and socially stable consensus on the mission. If this consensus collapses, a Dutch situation could develop in many capitals. NATO cannot afford this, since an alliance that dissolves on the battlefield would also be at its political end, too. That is why it would be careless to take in stride the events in The Hague or to ignore it as provincialism. If NATO does not soon announce a perspective for its withdrawal, an increasing number of governments will organize the withdrawal on their own - under pressure from their own population."

Handelsblatt (2/22) opined: "The implications for the NATO mission in Afghanistan are fatal. The Dutch coalition...broke apart at the time when the United States and NATO are planning a massive extension of their military engagement in Kabul. The Dutch will now withdraw their 1,800 forces from the Urusgan Province, thus creating a gap that will be difficult to fill. Canada approved its withdrawal for 2011 and other countries will follow. In Germany, too, a few days before the Bundestag vote on an extension of the Bundeswehr mandate in Afghanistan, the mood is depressing.... It is now coming back to haunt [the government] that it has hidden the mission behind empty words and the corrupt regime in Kabul."

In the view of Berliner Zeitung (2/22), "the Netherlands has always been considered a reliable partner in NATO and the EU. But with the

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collapse of the coalition, the country is now witnessing a foreign policy rupture. In the Afghanistan question, the issue is less the chance to succeed in the fight against the Taliban but rather the costs of the mission. When the international community advocated the fight against terror, we often heard the term 'global domestic policy,' but the Netherlands is now implementing a change and is demonstrating that domestic calculations still dominate future foreign policy cooperation among nations that are loyal to the Alliance."

Regional daily Neue Osnabrcker Zeitung (2/22) had this to say: "If the Dutch leave Afghanistan according to plan at the end of this year, they will leave with an elevated spirit. But they will leave a gap for NATO that can hardly be closed again. What the Germans sell as their strategic invention and what the Americans sell as the higher insight of their generals is what the Dutch demonstrated in Urusgan: to fight courageously and to build up the region in an even more courageous way. But it is by no means clear that the allies will succeed in doing so."

Stuttgarter Zeitung (2/22) is very pessimistic and argued: "The withdrawal of the Dutch forces means the beginning of the end of NATO. The solidarity that dominated under the impression of the Cold War for more than 40 years is disintegrating. NATO's motto is to act together. This was the idea, but reality shows that support for the Afghan war is crumbling in almost all western countries. Neither the national governments nor NATO itself have understood how to maintain the support of their own voters for this war. A disaster is now looming. If the Americans are the only ones who must shoulder the war in Afghanistan, the unity of the transatlantic region will fall apart."

13. (Iran) Nuclear Program

Under the headline: "End of Excuses, Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/20) judged: "Since Thursday, we have the first Iran report of new IAEA Director Yukiya Amano, and we must congratulate him for it. He did not reveal anything sensational but he has used more clear language and given the report a different emphasis than his predecessor, El Baradei, without snubbing or exposing him. Amano has drawn a comprehensive picture of the state of Iran's nuclear program and he made clear that it is the government in Tehran - not the West - that is not abiding by its commitments. Amano did not succumb to the temptation to encode Iran's efforts to build the bomb with the

support of difficult technical questions. In addition, the new IAEA head is also directing clear words to Tehran and to all conspiracy theorists, who ignore all incriminating evidence as 'falsified'.... With all this, Amano sent a sign to his agency, too, because he demonstrated that he has confidence in his inspectors after his predecessor El Baradei entertained doubts about them. But it is more important that the world now has a sound basis for its deliberations about future moves against Tehran. Following this report, no one can seriously believe any longer in the empty words from Tehran that Iran is not seeking to build nuclear weapons."

Frankfurter Allgemeine (2/20) opined: "Following the IAEA report, the question is: What now? The most appropriate answer would be to stop taking part in the Iranian game. When if not now should those sanctions be imposed that could at least influence the calculations of the Iranian powers-that-be? The Western powers should make a last-ditch attempt in the UNSC to integrate Russia and China. In the case of Moscow, this attempt could succeed. But one thing is striking -- there are obviously forces in Tehran who wish nothing more but an escalation of the conflict; they almost work for it. The IAEA report states that enriched uranium is stored above the ground. Is that an invitation?"

Under the headline; "Two Ugly Options In the Nuclear Conflict With

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Iran," Berliner Zeitung (2/20) editorialized: "Again only the military seems to be able to resolve a problem where politicians have failed. As a matter of fact, the U.S. and its partners had planned to resolve the problem with tougher sanctions. With such moves, those forces in the U.S. and Israel who are advocating a military strike should feel reassured. But if the Iranians are building a bomb, as the IAEA report allows us to assume, sanctions will not stop them. That is why the world must either accept Iranian having a nuclear bomb or the military must strike. These are two ugly options, and they are the only ones. The only alternative would be that the United States gives Iran security guarantees, begins a dialogue and lifts the embargo in exchange for the bomb. But with each new warning, each new intelligence report and now the IAEA report, pressure on President Obama will increase not to show consideration for such steps."

Under the headline: "Now the Time of Clubs Will Begin," Die Welt (2/20) opined: "We must really be worried if the IAEA uses such clear words in its latest report on Iran, stated that Iran is unwilling to cooperate and even considers it possible that Iranian scientists are currently working on a nuclear warhead. It is time to finally take action. However, we have heard this for years. The question is how Iran's President Ahmadinejad can be caught by surprise. Theodore Roosevelt said: 'Speak softly and carry a big club.' He is right and since Tehran refuses to talk, the time of the clubs is now beginning: The biggest club before a military strike would be a sea blockade. A blockade would really hurt the regime which keeps itself alive with presents to its supporters. And to make the pain hit the right people all international assets of the Iranian elite should be frozen. Further cudgel blows could follow. But this must really start right now."

14. (EU-Greece) Economic Crisis

According to Sueddeutsche (2/22), "state bankruptcies such as the one in Greece will be looming if the EU member states do not have binding budget criteria. The consequence is that countries that have abided by rules on budgetary discipline must now help bankruptcy candidates survive. The burden for the younger generation, however, continues to rise. That is why it is decisive that the EU creates a kind of debt ceiling for all member states that will punish any mismanagement. The Stability Pact proved that there is no other way out. No one has really stuck to this treaty. In the case of Greece, the EU must set clear conditions on how the country must restructure its budget. In order to prevent future state bankruptcies, a European institution according to the IMF model would help. That is why the euro countries must develop a procedure for a regular state insolvency."

15. (U.S.) Justice Department Report

Under the headline "Bottom of the Barrel," Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/22) dealt with the Justice Department's report on the authors of expert opinion on torture, John C Yoo and Jay S. Bybee, and judged: "People like John C. Yoo and Jay S. Bybee can be abused as faceless bureaucrats who pulled the strings...but since this weekend, it has been clear that the two shysters will never be called to account for their memos that justified torture--not in America and not even before other Lawyers'. Torture in the CIA camps continues to go unpunished. Even last year, President Obama decided that not a single torturer should be punished if they relied on Yoo and Bybee's legal expert opinions. Obama confirmed that he does not want to 'settle old accounts' and that he wants 'to look ahead.' But without re-examining these issues, the U.S. president will not be able to lead the nation out of the shadow of torture. On the contrary, John Yoo enjoys a cult status among conservative lawyers, and Dick Cheney, who ordered the torture memos, continues to speak week after week as if the disrespect of the Constitution and decency

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can last forever."

16. (UK) Brown in a Bad Temper

Sueddeutsche Zeitung (2/22) carried a front-page report under the headline: "Brown Allegedly Misbehaves in Downing Street." And reported: "As a matter of fact it should not have been a surprise. The public has known for a long time that once in a while, telephones, ring binders, or other stationary flies around in Downing Street, where Gordon Brown resides. Great Britain's Prime Minister is a choleric, and his tantrums are legendary. But Brown's latest appearance on TV nevertheless astonished the British. And for the first time in history, an acting PM had to dismiss accusations that he would sometimes beat up his staff.... But it is paradoxical that his prospects for the upcoming elections have improved. According to opinion polls, the Labor Party has halved the lead of the Conservative Party from 13 to six percent; and Brown's personal popularity has increased, too - from minus 50 to minus 21."

Under the headline: "Nightmare Plant in Downing Street," Financial Times Deutschland (2/22) wrote: "Britain's former PM Tony Blair served as a model for a political thriller. His successor Gordon Brown could now follow in his footsteps. A week ago, Brown moved his compatriots when he spoke in public about the death of his daughter Jennifer...but the 59-year-old government leader also has another, less glorious side. We learn this from a book of Andrew Rawnsley, who is well-connected. He described Brown as a thin-skinned, paranoid politician who frightens close aides and pelts them with curses. These revelations confirm the picture which journalists and supporters drew when Brown was the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Tony Blair's rival...."

MURPHY